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Totalizing identities

The ambiguous legacy of Aristotle and Hegel after Auschwitz

Abstract The Holocaust throws the study of the history of philosophy into crisis. Critiques of Western thinking leveled by such thinkers as Adorno, Levinas and, more recently, postmodern theorists have suggested that Western philosophy is inherently totalizing and that it must be read differently or altogether abandoned after Auschwitz. This article intentionally rereads Aristotle and Hegel through the shattered lens of the Holocaust. Its refracted focus is the question of ontological identity. By investigating the manner in which the totalizing dimensions of Aristotle's thinking are both eclipsed and implicitly endorsed by Hegel's appropriation of Aristotle's conception of God, and further by following the surplus of Hegel's (mis)interpretation back into the heart of Aristotle's ontology where we find a more open conception of ontological identity, we come to recognize not only the dangers endemic to certain strands of traditional philosophical thinking, but also the resources this tradition itself brings to bear on the attempt to think ontological identity after Auschwitz.

Key words Aristotle · Hegel · Holocaust · identity · modernity · ontology · *phronēsis* · praxis

Insgeheim ist Nichtidentität das Telos der Identifikation, das an ihr zu Rettende; der Fehler des traditionellen Denkens, daß es die Identität für sein Ziel halt. (Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*)

In the wake of the atrocities of the 20th century, it may seem anachronistic to speak again of ontological identity. Surely, the strong indictments leveled against both ontology and identity by such thinkers as Emmanuel Levinas and Theodor Adorno are enough to convince us to reject all talk of ontological identity as symptomatic of a kind of

thinking that is inherently totalizing.¹ Indeed, both Levinas and Adorno, whatever their differences may be, operate from the common intuition that the Holocaust was made possible by certain tendencies endemic to Western philosophical thinking. More recently, a number of 'post-modern' theorists have deepened this line of criticism by suggesting that the Holocaust was no mere aberration, but rather the most extreme expression of the modern mind-set that seeks to render the world absolutely rational by purging it of everything Other.² Ironically, of course, such categorical indictments of modernity and, by extension, of the entire history from which modernity emerged, themselves operate with the same sort of totalizing conception of identity they are designed to undermine. To posit an ultimate 'post' over against a totalizing 'modernity' is to collude in precisely the sort of totalizing thinking post-modernism rightly intends to overcome.

Yet there is something convincing about such indictments, for surely there is a deep strand of thinking that runs through the history of Western philosophy that can fairly be called 'totalizing', if not explicitly totalitarian. One example of this sort of totalizing thinking can be found in Aristotle's conception of ontological identity as expressed in book XII of his *Metaphysics* in his treatment of God as thought thinking itself. In this text, Aristotle explicitly seeks to establish a firm order for his metaphysical system by purging the principle of potency from God's being. This strategy is totalizing insofar as it secures identity for the sake of order by doing away with difference. This ancient idea is translated into modern thinking by Hegel, who saw in Aristotle's conception of God the very principle of modern subjectivity.³ This, of course, is not without a great deal of irony, for no one knew better than Hegel that there is no identity without difference, that, indeed, the subject wins its own identity only through the positing and determinate negating of difference.⁴ Thus, in order to accomplish this translation of Aristotle's thinking, Hegel must systematically ignore Aristotle's attempts to do away completely with difference. Despite this misreading, the totalizing dimension of Aristotle's thinking seeps into Hegel's own conception of identity under the guise of the all-absorbing dialectic of the subject in which difference is posited and affirmed, *only in order then to be overcome*. Here, Aristotle's totalizing metaphysics in which God is posited as the most authoritative principle is transformed into a metaphysics of mere toleration in which the subject freely posits and then overcomes difference in order to establish its own identity. Given this, it is no surprise that in their critiques of the totalizing tendencies of modernity, Adorno, Levinas and a number of more recent theorists focus on what Jean-Luc Nancy calls the 'modern ideology of identity' and specifically on the Hegelian philosophy of the subject.⁵

However, Hegel's misinterpretation of Aristotle is also highly instructive, for it suggests the possibility that in Aristotle not only might we locate the seeds of a very dangerous kind of thinking, but also, we might uncover another notion of ontological identity latent in him, perverted neither by the tendency to posit God as the ultimate authoritative principle nor by the modern metaphysics of the all-absorbing subject. Precisely such a conception of identity is suggested by Aristotle at the end of his discussion of sensible substance in the middle books of the *Metaphysics* and is developed to some inchoate extent in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In *Metaphysics* book IX, Aristotle suggests the possibility that the identity of *energeia* and *dynamis* may be thought in terms of *praxis*. With this vocabulary, Aristotle leaves off the hyper-rational impulse to reduce all difference to identity, taking up instead the much more difficult challenge to think identity without doing away with difference. Some insight into how such a conception of identity may function is then hinted at within the context of the discussion of *phronēsis* found in *Nicomachean Ethics* book VI. Thus, by investigating the manner in which the totalizing dimensions of Aristotle's thinking are both eclipsed and implicitly endorsed by Hegel's appropriation of Aristotle's conception of God, and further by following the surplus of Hegel's misinterpretation back into the heart of Aristotle's ontology where we find a more open conception of ontological identity, we come to recognize not only the dangers endemic to certain strands of traditional philosophical thinking, but also the resources this tradition itself brings to bear on the attempt to think ontological identity after Auschwitz.

Aristotle's totalizing thinking

To argue that Aristotle's conception of God as it is developed in *Metaphysics* book XII is totalizing and to situate this argument within the context of the challenges philosophy faces after Auschwitz is to risk a profound misunderstanding; for it would be both irresponsible and naïve to suggest that Aristotle was somehow a proto-Nazi. Yet it would be equally irresponsible and naïve to suggest that the basic structure of Western thinking had nothing whatsoever to do with the Holocaust. Indeed, the entirety of Western philosophy is indicted by the Holocaust. This indictment, however, does not render philosophy entirely and exclusively culpable, rather it enjoins philosophy's self-reflection and immanent critique. Arguably, there is no one single thinker who has had more influence on the structure of Western thinking than Aristotle; whether we are aware of it or not, our thinking remains thoroughly Aristotelian.⁶ For this reason, after the atrocities the West has wrought in the 20th century, it is only natural to return to Aristotle with a critical

eye, not to indict him for crimes against humanity, but to question those strands of his philosophy that, through the centuries, have saturated our thinking to such a degree that the effect of its influence is difficult to discern.

One such strand can be found in *Metaphysics* book XII, where Aristotle argues for a single, supreme, authoritative principle designed to secure, once and for all, the coherence and order of the universe. Historically, this text has often been interpreted as the highest expression and culmination of the Aristotelian metaphysics.⁷ The idea of a single supreme principle is powerfully developed in *Metaphysics* book XII, chapters 6–10. With the possible exception of chapter 8, in which Aristotle – who may have been influenced by the astronomical insights of Eudoxus and his pupil Callippus – suggests that there may be a multiplicity of prime movers, the argument developed in chapters 6–10 hangs together quite well and lends instructive insight into what is being called the totalizing dimension of Aristotle's thinking.⁸

The main concern that informs Aristotle's discussion in chapters 6–10 is the problem of order. To this extent, this text resonates with a main preoccupation of Western thinking in general, namely, the desire to affirm order in a world of flux. Richard Bernstein calls this desire 'Cartesian Anxiety', suggesting by this term the very human impulse to seek some permanent fixed point upon which to orient and stabilize the world in the face of the vagaries of finite existence.⁹ What Bernstein describes as 'Cartesian' could equally have been called 'Aristotelian',¹⁰ as the same anxiety informs Aristotle's conception of God. To put it strongly: Aristotle posits the monarchy of God so as to secure order over anarchic disorder. In so doing, however, he engages in a totalizing strategy that perceives difference as the ultimate threat to order and thus systematically seeks to reduce all otherness to the same.

The characteristics ascribed to God throughout chapters 6 through 10 bear this out. In the face of the transitory nature of the world, Aristotle posits a principle eternal and unmoved.¹¹ Over against the harrowing contingency of existence, he posits a necessary principle that is separate and unaffected.¹² Finally, over the vast plurality of beings, he posits the simple, which, strictly speaking, cannot rightfully be called '*monarchic*', for oneness would be too diverse for it. Indeed, Aristotle suggests that 'one' signifies a measure, while 'simple' only signifies a way of being.¹³ God tolerates no difference. Such characterizations cohere with the strategy of totalization insofar as they work together to establish the absolute authority of God, the ultimate principle of being, towards which all is related and from which all is determined. A closer look at each of these facets of God's nature will deepen our understanding of the totalizing strategy that informs Aristotle's thinking here.

As eternal, the first principle is subject neither to generation nor to

destruction, but rather functions as the first source and ultimate guarantor of all motion in the universe.¹⁴ Here Aristotle's primary concern is to locate the ultimate final cause of motion so as to secure the basic order of the cosmos. In so doing, however, he seems to have proved too much, for the metaphor Aristotle deploys is that of the circle closed in upon itself, a metaphor that secures order only to deny novelty. In a perfectly cyclical universe, nothing new can ever happen, there is, to borrow the Nietzschean term, an eternal recurrence of the same.¹⁵ The first principle, itself immovable, causes the perennial circular motion of the celestial bodies without itself being affected in any way. It is able to do this because it causes the universe to move by desire.¹⁶ Ross correctly recognizes the significance of the metaphor of desire when he suggests that desire is the only conception of motion in Aristotle that is not reciprocal – the desired object stimulates without being itself stimulated.¹⁷ This is precisely the sort of conception Aristotle must develop if he is to establish the absolute authority of the ultimate principle of order. The necessary condition for such a position is that that which moves is absolutely unaffected by that which it moves.

By making the first principle order all by desire, Aristotle accomplishes two things at once. First, he secures the absolute independence and self-sufficiency of the first principle. This is reaffirmed at the end of chapter 7 when Aristotle writes: 'It is apparent from the things having been said that there exists some eternal and immovable substance having separated itself [*kechōrismē*] from the sensible things.'¹⁸ Here the perfect participle of the verb *chōrizein* – to separate, to divide – is employed. In Greek, the perfect tense expresses completed aspect in present time. By using the perfect participle here and, further, by placing this participle in the middle voice,¹⁹ Aristotle is simultaneously able to emphasize God's ultimate independence, His total perfection and His absolute self-sufficiency. Second, by deploying the metaphor of desire as the model by which the first mover moves, Aristotle is able to transform the external imposition of authority into a sort of immanent principle of the governed. This transference is decisive, for it indicates how thoroughly the first principle saturates everything that can in any way be said to be. The first principle has been infused into the very being of the ruled; it has become, we are told, what the ruled themselves desire.²⁰

The totalizing strategy emerges out of an attempt to establish the absolute authority of the first principle. If Aristotle's thinking here were only authoritarian and not totalizing as well, the scope and power of the first principle would have been limited, and there would have remained an Other outside its purview.²¹ The manner in which the authoritarian dimension of Aristotle's thinking becomes genuinely totalizing can be clearly seen in the famous formulation of God as 'the thinking of thinking':

First, then, if He is not thinking, but potentiality, it is reasonable to say that holding together His own thinking would be wearisome. Thereupon, it would be clear that something other [*allo ti*] would be more honorable than thought, namely, that which is thought, for to think or thinking belong also to that which thinks the worst things, with the result that if this must be avoided (for some things are better not to see than to see), thinking would not be the best. Therefore, He thinks Himself, if indeed it is the best, and thinking is the thinking of thinking [*noesis noeseōs*].²²

Two aspects of this passage are particularly striking. First, Aristotle explicitly rejects the possibility that there is any dimension of potentiality in God. There can be no potentiality here, for, on the abstract level, potentiality would infect the nobility of God's existence, and on the practical level, if God had to constantly overcome potentiality, He would become weary and His eternal nature would be threatened. This rejection of potentiality is symptomatic of Aristotle's totalizing strategy. Indeed, it has already been implicitly established in chapters 6 and 7 wherever Aristotle insists on the simplicity of the first principle, its pure actuality and its existence 'without matter'.²³ These formulations are all expressions of the tendency to do away with difference, for difference has traditionally been taken as a patent threat to the order of things.

The second striking aspect of the above passage is the manner in which Aristotle actually arrives at the allegedly radical and visionary formulation that God is 'the thinking of thinking'.²⁴ This formulation turns out to be Aristotle's only real alternative, for if God was thinking anything other than Himself, then it would by definition be inferior and less excellent. Thus, Aristotle arrives at '*noesis noeseōs*' by default. It does appear, however, that when this formula is taken in isolation, the genitive seems to import a dimension of difference into the structure of the first principle insofar as it differentiates the activity of thinking from the object thought. But when read within the context of the larger discussion of God, this genitive cannot be understood as a means by which to express difference in identity; rather, it is only the ultimate reaffirmation of the Same. If His authority is to remain absolute – as it must if He is to fulfill His foundational function as the ultimate principle of order – God cannot think anything other than Himself.

Admittedly, some of the metaphors Aristotle uses to establish the first principle do not always reinforce the explicit attempts to do away with difference that are rife throughout the text. This is particularly clear in the most famous and poetic section of chapter 7, where Aristotle establishes the analogy between the thinking of God and the thinking of human beings by deploying the problematic metaphor of life to describe the nature of God's existence.

The analogy with human thinking, which resonates in vocabulary and formulation with the complicated discussion of the similarities

between thinking and sensation in the *De Anima*, is set up by Aristotle only to be immediately transcended.²⁵ Indeed, Aristotle's formulation is, quite literally, wonderful: 'If, then, God exists well always, as we exist but only sometimes, it is most wonderful [*thaumaston*]; but if He exists more, this is yet more wonderful [*thaumasiōteron*]. And God exists in the latter way.'²⁶ These are powerful words coming from the father of prosaic prose. To place the comparative *after* the superlative – more wonderful than the most wonderful – is to point to an existence beyond the bounds of human expression. It is to reaffirm the absolute authority of God, not beyond being itself, but rather as the highest principle of being.

Following the analogy with human being further, Aristotle speaks of God's wonderful existence in terms of 'life'. 'We say that God is a living being that is eternal and best, with the result that life and continuous duration and eternity belong to God, for this is God.'²⁷ Here God is called 'living' because He is not only eternal, but also responsible for the continuous duration of the universe. Indeed, two separate functions are ascribed to a single principle; on the one hand, God is the first principle of becoming, ruling by desire and maintaining the constant order of the cosmos; on the other hand, God is the first principle of being, existing eternally having been separated from the transient world of becoming. The question remains, however, as to whether the metaphor of life is appropriate for either of these functions, for when 'life' comes to mean that which is devoid of difference, that which 'can in no way be other than it is',²⁸ that which is in no wise potential, then surely it has ceased to retain either its original meaning or its explanatory value.

Obviously, the metaphor is important, and to insist on its impropriety is not to critique the impulse that may have driven Aristotle to deploy it. Indeed, perhaps it is the impulse itself that should be affirmed, for the concept of 'life', because it cannot be thought in isolation from the otherness that in part determines it, is anathema to the totalizing strategy deployed throughout this text. Perhaps its appearance here indicates the extent to which Aristotle was at odds with himself. Yet even here, Aristotle is intent on emphasizing the supremacy and purity of God's actuality: 'His actuality is in virtue of itself a life that is the best and is eternal.'²⁹ As pure actuality, God must be totally devoid of all potency, and Aristotle, despite the genitive in the '*noesis noeseōs*' formulation and despite the metaphor of life, is intent on securing His supreme authority by purging from His being any principle of difference that may undermine His power.³⁰

Totalizing tropes

The two different functions ascribed to the ultimate principle – its role as the final cause of motion and as the highest principle of being – lead Aristotle to consider the precise manner in which it establishes the good in the world. For, in its former role, it would make sense to suggest that the first principle, being itself good, is inherent in the order of the world, while in its later role, it would seem more appropriate if it were somehow transcendent of the order, instilling its goodness in the world from outside. The two tropes Aristotle employs to clarify his position are rather revealing. He suggests that perhaps the situation is something like that obtaining in an army where the good is both in the order and in the general. And immediately upon this suggestion, Aristotle hastens to add: 'and it is rather in the general, for he is not because of the order, but the order is because of him.'³¹ Here Aristotle is again concerned to maintain the order of the world by positing the absolute authority of the general over the order he establishes. Indeed, Aristotle goes on to assert that 'all things are ordered in relation to one thing',³² and that this situation is analogous to the manner in which the order of the household is secured; for the freemen, who themselves are least at liberty to act randomly, set the household in order and control the slaves and livestock, who tend toward anarchic activity.³³ Thus, just as God cannot be other than He is and exists according to the highest necessity in order to establish and maintain the order of the universe, so too are the generals and the freemen less able to act however they wish in order to establish and maintain order in the army and household respectively.

These two tropes, the general and the head of the household, do not merely serve as illuminating metaphors that allow us to better understand the nature of the existence of the highest principle, they also hint at the extent to which Aristotle's metaphysical position is determined by political thinking. In both analogies, the absolute authority of the highest principle is not to be challenged and good rule depends on the subsumption of all opposition to the authority of the ruler. Thus, Aristotle writes at the end of book X, 'beings don't want to be governed badly' and, quoting Odysseus from book II of the *Iliad*, he concludes that 'the rule of many is not good, let one the ruler be'.³⁴ Here again the maneuver of transference is manifest, for the imposition of order does not seem so violent when the desire for it is ascribed to the governed. And yet, the structure of this way of thinking is totalizing at its very core, for it is a basic feature of totalitarian regimes not only to subvert all opposition, but also to impose their own position on the governed by passing it off as something the governed themselves desire.³⁵

According to Hannah Arendt, for modern totalitarian regimes, ideology accomplishes this sort of transference whereby the external rule of the authority is internalized.

Totalitarianism is never content to rule by external means, namely, through the state and a machinery of violence; thanks to its peculiar ideology and the role assigned to it in this apparatus of coercion, totalitarianism has discovered a means of dominating and terrorizing human beings from within.³⁶

For Aristotle, the ideology of God as thought thinking itself, pure act devoid of potency, operates as the ultimate principle of being. It is the idea according to which the world is set in order.³⁷ Thus, what emerges from the preceding analysis is the manner in which this ultimate idea, by assimilating all opposition and asserting its absolute authority, establishes a totalizing hegemony.

From God to the subject – Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*

In order to determine to what extent this totalizing tendency finds its way into the modern mind-set, we may turn to Hegel, who translates into the language of modernity, and specifically that of modern subjectivity, Aristotle's conception of God as thought thinking itself.

Hegel divides his interpretation of the *Metaphysics* into three moments: the moment of immediacy, in which form and matter remain fundamentally distinct; the moment of activity, in which the more dynamic terms of *energeia* and *dynamis* are introduced; and finally, the highest stage of mediation in which the identity of *energeia* and *dynamis* is thought in terms of pure activity.³⁸ A brief outline of these three stages will reveal the extent to which Hegel's own conception of subjectivity not only is determined by Aristotle's understanding of God but also retains something of the totalizing tendency endemic to it. On the other hand, Hegel's interpretation will also suggest the possibility of locating another, less totalizing and more open conception of ontological identity in Aristotle, a conception to which Hegel points but over which he steps too swiftly.

Sensible substance

The first stage of Hegel's interpretation of the *Metaphysics* is that of finite sensible *ousia*.³⁹ The fundamental characterization of finite *ousia* is the external opposition between form and matter. Form and matter

are here strictly distinct from one another and they remain in this mode of opposition. For Hegel, the fact that this relationship remains external is fundamental – it indicates that Aristotle's thought at this stage remains lifeless. He writes: 'Matter is the dead substrate, the subject, "the ground on which change happens"; matter suffers changes.'⁴⁰ Here the concept of matter is understood in terms of the *hypokeimenon*, that which underlies all change. The conception of the *hypokeimenon*, however, inadequately accounts for substantial generation, the kind of change most important to Aristotle himself. Hegel correctly points this out by implicitly referring to the opening lines of *Metaphysics* VII.7 and stressing the externality of the relations offered there:

Thus it is posited: a) matter, the universal being, substrate of change, indifference to the opposition; b) the determinations, the negative, against one another; c) the moving, the pure activity. Thus, the moments appear distinguished in sensible substance, but the return [*Rückkehr*] into themselves does not yet appear.⁴¹

For Hegel this *return* of the moments into themselves is of decisive importance – not only is it what accounts for the progression from the first to the second moment, but also it expresses what for Hegel is Aristotle's most profound insight, namely that by taking its principle into itself, *ousia* can become self-determining. It is the turning towards one another of form and matter, the entering into relation and, ultimately, the affirmation of this relation as the determining ground of its being that Hegel sees as decisively important in Aristotle.

Effective substance: from matter to thought

In the turning towards one another of form and matter, Hegel continues, a 'higher kind' of substance appears.⁴² Here, matter is thematized in terms of *dynamis* and form in terms of *energeia*. However, according to Hegel, form as *energeia* is further thematized in terms of the Understanding (*Verstand, nous*). *Nous* is here introduced as that activity which in itself can preserve the diverse moments of becoming. *Nous* determines the end towards which the process of becoming is directed. Hegel offers this closer determination of the two moments that make up this second stage of substance: 'The two extremes are matter (possibility) and thought (effectiveness) [*Wirksamkeit*], the first is the passive universal, the second the active universal.'⁴³ Here already, the direction of Hegel's interpretation is determined. The move will be toward pure thought, where the material principle is *aufgehoben*, negated and preserved.

Yet, the question already arises: to what extent can it really be said that difference is *preserved* in pure thought? Does not matter pollute

the purity of thought? At this point in Hegel's interpretation, however, the dissolution of matter is only intimated and the present introduction of the notion of *nous* may be recognized as merely the first symptom of the continued efficacy of Aristotle's old totalizing tendency – that is, the tendency to seek refuge in pure thought as the ultimate principle. For now, in this second moment, matter, the principle of difference, is permitted to hold its own, and, although transformed by its thematization in terms of *dynamis*, it is not altogether assimilated. Thus, difference between thought and matter is posited:

In sensible substance the active is still completely distinct from matter. *Nous* is, however, in and for itself determinate, this content is *actu*; but the Understanding [*Verstand, nous*] thus still requires matter, with which it is not as yet identical, matter is presupposed.⁴⁴

At this juncture, the 'two extremes' are brought into relation with one another but this relation itself is not understood as something fundamental. Thus, the second stage marks the relation between thought and matter, but not their mutual ontological dependence.

Before adumbrating the final moment of Hegel's reading of Aristotle's conception of *ousia*, the moment of identity, it is significant to note that already here in the second moment, the dichotomy is established between matter and *thought*, rather than, as in the *Metaphysics* itself, between matter and form. Hegel seems to have the model of production in mind here whereby the idea (*eidos*) of the architect is juxtaposed to the matter upon which she or he works. This move to establish the distinction between matter and *nous* rather than matter and form indicates a certain hedging that is determined by the ultimate goal of Hegel's argument: to understand the Aristotelian conception of *ousia* in terms of thought, and, therefore, to transform Aristotle into an idealist of the greatest genius. Hegel makes no secret of this intention; in fact, it largely determines his critique of contemporary commentators on Aristotle: they see Aristotle as a mere empiricist, while Hegel recognizes him as the first great idealist.⁴⁵ However, the question with which we are here concerned has not so much to do with the extent to which Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle is 'correct', but rather with the extent to which what might be called this 'idealistic move' is itself a dangerous remnant of the totalizing tendency endemic to Aristotle's understanding of the highest *ousia*.

Absolute substance

The 'highest point' of Aristotle's thinking about substance occurs when *dynamis*, *energeia* and *entelecheia* are united.⁴⁶ For Hegel, this is

accomplished by Aristotle in the conception of pure thought thinking itself, *noesis noeseōs*; for, according to him, it is with this concept that Aristotle thinks the identity of potentiality and actuality. In order to do this, however, Hegel must read the moment of difference back into the structure of the first principle. Given Aristotle's own unequivocal rejection of potency and matter, any such interpretation requires a great deal of hermeneutical acrobatics in which those passages where Aristotle explicitly rejects the principle of difference are eclipsed by those passages that deploy difference-affirming metaphors. Precisely such acrobatics determine Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle's God.

In response to Aristotle's rather explicit denial that the first principle includes matter,⁴⁷ Hegel writes: 'Here the manner in which a predicate is merely denied without its truth being expressed is manifest; matter is a moment of the unmoved being.'⁴⁸ According to Hegel, Aristotle's rejection of matter is merely abstract and thus does not speak the speculative truth because absolute substance must include the moment of difference, the moment of matter. Although this insight explains how Hegel can locate in Aristotle the discovery of the true power of determining negation,⁴⁹ it also elucidates the manner in which Hegel systematically (mis)interprets Aristotle in such a way that his conception of the highest principle expresses precisely what Hegel means when he speaks of the speculative Idea, namely, that which remains self-identical in difference. Indeed, when he is faced with the text from chapter 9 in which Aristotle explicitly denies that the first principle can in any way be in potency, Hegel simply cites it affirmingly and emphasizes the implication of this notion, namely, that thinking must think nothing other than itself and thus that in its activity, it remains identical with itself.⁵⁰ This sort of selective (mis)reading that downplays or explains away Aristotle's rather vigorous attempt to do away with the principle of difference in order to read the moment of difference back into the highest principle characterizes Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle throughout.

However, the obfuscating strategy Hegel most often deploys is that of excessive praise. He focuses on and effusively endorses precisely those elements of Aristotle's thinking that resonate with his own conception of identity. Thus, when Aristotle appeals to the totalizing metaphor of the circle to explain the manner in which the unmoved mover moves the universe, Hegel writes: 'The unmoved that moves – this is Aristotle's great determination; that which remains self-identical, the Idea, which moves and remains in relation with itself.'⁵¹ Here Hegel suggests that Aristotle's formulation resonates with his own determinations of subjectivity, for like the subject of Hegel's idealism, Aristotle's unmoved mover remains self-identical in its activity. Indeed, just as Hegel determines the I as the active unity of the subject and object,⁵² so too does

he see in Aristotle's conception of God an identity capable of holding itself with itself in difference. Hegel writes:

[God's energy] is activity, movement, repulsion and thus not dead identity; it is identity with itself in difference. If Aristotle had made the straw identity of the understanding or experience into a principle, he would have never arrived at the speculative idea. Possibility and actuality are identical; *nous* is also *dynamis*, but not the universal possibility but rather singularity and activity.⁵³

For Hegel, Aristotle's conception of God anticipates the modern conception of subjectivity precisely because it *retains* a dimension of potency.⁵⁴ And yet, Aristotle himself is quite clear that, contrary to what Hegel tells us here, the highest principle is a *nous* without *dynamis*; it is pure actuality, devoid of any principle of difference that would undermine its authority.

If indeed Hegel systematically misinterprets Aristotle by importing the moment of difference back into a principle that had been characterized as totalizing *precisely because* it annihilated difference, does not this misinterpretation itself constitute a genuine progressive improvement of the Aristotelian position? Does not Hegel precisely read the totalizing tendency out of Aristotle's thinking, allowing it once again to endorse difference?

To the extent that Hegel affirms difference, he moves beyond the totalizing dimension of Aristotle's thinking and establishes a more tolerant conception of ontological identity. By translating Aristotle's understanding of God into the vocabulary of modern subjectivity, Hegel has shattered the absolute monarchy of mind and uncovered its dynamic internal structure. However, the very dialectical logic of subjectivity retains something of the totalizing tendency of Aristotle's thinking, for difference is not affirmed in and of itself, but only *as a moment* of the dynamic identity of the subject. Indeed, difference is tolerated only insofar as it can be overcome; it exists for the sake of identity and is not affirmed in its own right. To this extent, Hegel's conception of subjectivity, which deploys a metaphysics of toleration and assimilation, remains totalizing in that it reduces difference to a moment of identity, privileging always identity over difference. While the toleration of difference is a marked improvement over Aristotle's explicit attempts to annihilate difference altogether, it is not enough, for toleration continues to operate within a logic of assimilation that seeks to establish identity by overcoming otherness – difference is posited *only in order that it may be overcome*.⁵⁵

Although Hegel's conception of subjectivity retains something of the totalizing tendencies delineated in Aristotle, there is another dimension of Hegel's appropriation of Aristotle's conception of *noesis noeseōs* that

may be designated as totalizing in a more radical sense. This dimension finds expression in Hegel's attempt to establish the overarching importance of thought. In this, Hegel recognizes a difference between his thinking and Aristotle's:

[Aristotle] does not say, [thought] alone is true, that all is thought; but rather, he says that it is the first, strongest, most honorable. We say that thought, as that which relates itself to itself, is, that it is the truth. Further, we say that thought is the whole truth, but Aristotle does not say this.⁵⁶

Here, for the first time Hegel distances himself from Aristotle's thinking. The difference he delineates seems to be one of scope and radicality, for Aristotle has yet to achieve the highest, most radical recognition of speculative idealism, namely, that all is thought, that thought has the capacity to penetrate all being, to comprehend it and saturate it fully with meaning.

Recent critiques of modern thinking, particularly those concerned with the relationship between modernity and the Holocaust, have suggested that such an attempt to render everything rational finds its most radical and destructive expression in Nazism's hyper-rational, systematic attempt to annihilate the Jewish people.⁵⁷ However, to recognize the totalizing tendencies endemic to Western philosophical thinking from its beginning is not to endorse the more radical critique of modernity that reads the Holocaust as the final destination of the modern drive toward total rationalization. Rather, by exposing the totalizing legacy of Western thought in Aristotle and Hegel, it is hoped that a deeper appreciation of the extent to which Western philosophy is implicitly indebted to a structure of thinking that is inherently dangerous may be achieved. But there is another motivation that animates this archeology, for although the totalizing tendency in Western thinking is strong, it is by no means the only mode of thinking discernible in the diverse and fecund tradition of the Occident.⁵⁸ Within this tradition, indeed, in the thinking of Aristotle itself, there appear ideas and tropes that are potentially instructive for the attempt to think a non-totalizing conception of ontological identity in which the tension between identity and difference is held without ultimately privileging the One over the Other for the sake of security and order.

Reconsidering Aristotle

In fact, it is Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle's thinking that leads us back to Aristotle with new ears. By pointing to Aristotle's ultimate unwillingness to reduce all things to thought and by suggesting that there is in Aristotle a deep desire to do justice to difference, Hegel hints

at the possibility that there may be in Aristotle another conception of ontological identity that is not guided by the ultimate desire to establish order by doing away with difference. However, this other conception of ontological identity, if it itself is not to succumb to the totalizing tendencies of the tradition from which it emerges, cannot allow itself to be perverted by modern subjectivity. Indeed, the return to Aristotle is animated, at least in part, by the need to step back behind the ideology of the subject, which, as we have suggested, is itself little more than an appropriation of Aristotle's totalizing conception of God mapped onto the modern 'discovery' of the radical autonomy of the subject.

Ironically, our rehearsal of Hegel's own appropriation of Aristotle suggests precisely where this other conception of ontological identity may be found in Aristotle – for we saw how Hegel, in his impetuous desire to establish the relation between matter and *nous* so as ultimately to affirm the absolute authority of thinking, eclipses the important relationship between matter and *eidos*, form. With this shift in focus from *eidos* to *nous*, and, further, with the swift move from the second moment of the development of the speculative idea in which difference is maintained and affirmed to the third moment in which identity and difference are reconciled in the ultimate figure of God, Hegel points to and quickly covers over that moment of Aristotle's thinking that points to a non-totalizing conception of ontological identity. In order to retrieve this moment from the powerful flow of Hegel's dialectical interpretation,⁵⁹ it is necessary to pause at the moment of difference and focus on the difficult middle books of the *Metaphysics* where, having realized that 'to do away with matter is useless effort',⁶⁰ Aristotle is not obsessed with establishing the most authoritative, highest, first principle of being; rather, he is intent on thinking the dynamic identity of the concrete composite individual. This shift in focus allows Aristotle to relinquish the totalizing tendency to reject difference for the sake of stability and order and allows him to think his way into the ambiguous identity of the individual itself.

Following the trajectory of the middle books, it is possible to suggest that by the end of book VII, Aristotle has reached an impasse in his attempt to develop a coherent interpretation of the being of sensible *ousia* precisely because of the conflicting claims imposed upon it by matter and form.⁶¹ This difficulty forces Aristotle to reformulate the manner of his questioning concerning *ousia*. Rather than asking, 'What is *ousia*?', Aristotle suggests the more succinct question: 'Why is the matter some one thing?'⁶² This question shifts the focus of Aristotle's attention to the question of the ontological identity of the individual and specifically to the *relation between* form and matter. With this, however, the main issue becomes the attempt to think the manner in

which, as Aristotle himself says at the end of book VIII, form and matter, now having been translated into the more dynamic terms of *energeia* and *dynamis* respectively, can be understood to be *somehow* (*pōs*) one and the same.⁶³

The indeterminacy of this 'somehow', rather than taking away from the power of Aristotle's account, actually injects it with a new and highly significant, though largely underdeveloped, dimension of openness. In *Metaphysics* book IX, Aristotle develops a conception of *dynamis* and *energeia* that extends beyond the traditional manner in which these had been understood in antiquity; for, as Aristotle points out, the most proper senses of the terms had applied to beings in motion: that which exists in potency does not yet exist actually and when it comes into actuality, it ceases to exist potentially, at least with respect to that aspect of the being that is in motion.⁶⁴ However, in book IX, Aristotle is concerned to develop a conception of the relation between *energeia* and *dynamis* beyond the order of motion in order to think the dynamic being of the finite individual itself.

This he does in chapter 6, when he introduces a distinction between motion (*kinēsis*) and activity (*energeia*) by suggesting that an activity, unlike a motion, is not determined by some external goal, but rather has its end in itself. This sort of activity Aristotle calls '*praxis*',⁶⁵ action, designating with this term the activity according to which the relation between *energeia* and *dynamis* may be thought. Aristotle determines the nature of this sort of *praxis* with a very peculiar formulation. He says that in such actions, the same thing, for example, 'is seeing and has seen [*eōrake*] at the same time, and likewise is practically wise and has been practically wise [*pephronēke*], is thinking and has thought [*nenōēken*] . . . is living well and has lived well [*ezēken*], is happy and has been happy [*eudaimonēken*]'.⁶⁶ The peculiar formulation Aristotle deploys here, placing the present tense of the verb next to an iteration of the same verb in the perfect tense, has been a source of debate among scholars for some time.⁶⁷

However, one possible interpretation is that Aristotle is here groping for a conception of ontological identity that would do justice to difference, with its concomitant dimension of uncertainty and instability, while affirming the basic order in which such an activity is always inscribed. On such a reading, the perfect, with its completed aspect in present time, would emphasize the historicity of the being whose identity is this activity. Thus, the perfect would affirm the formal continuity between generations with which Aristotle is so often concerned.⁶⁸ It would reinforce not only the biological but also the social-political truth that part of what constitutes the identity of such a being is its history, the place and family into which it is born, the context in which it is always already situated.

Aristotle begins to infuse a certain dimension of uncertainty and instability into this conception of ontological identity by claiming that such an action has its end in itself.⁶⁹ Unlike a motion (*kinēsis*), which is (pre-)determined by an external goal and dies upon the achievement of that goal, a *praxis* has its end in itself; it is an *entelecheia*. This dimension of *praxis* is destabilizing to some extent, for it situates the principle of determination in the activity itself – it renders the being free and self-determining. The temporal dimension towards which this aspect of the ontological identity of *praxis* is directed is the future. Yet it is important not, as some have, to become overly intoxicated with this dimension of *praxis*; for while it is liberating indeed, when given absolute priority, it is also potentially dangerous, for it can lead to the delusion endemic to subjective idealism in which all exists as a determination of the subject.⁷⁰ Aristotle's notion of *praxis* tempers this sort of intoxication in two ways, first by emphasizing the importance of historicity in the appeal to the perfect, and second by emphatically affirming the *present*.

In fact, Aristotle affirms the present in a twofold fashion as he develops the meaning of *praxis* in *Metaphysics* IX.6. First, as mentioned, the perfect tense in Greek is present in time. What distinguishes it from the present tense is its aspect – the perfect has completed, while the present has progressive/repeated aspect. Thus, by placing the perfect next to the present in the manner Aristotle does in his rather strange formulation of the happening of *praxis*, he offers a doubled emphasis on the importance of the present. Indeed, it is the present tense, with its progressive aspect, that takes on enormous significance in this formulation; for such an action can hold itself together, so to speak, only so long as it is in its activity (*en-ergeia*), that is, so long as it is the ongoing activity of mediating between its history and its future, its matter and its form, *dynamis* and *energeia*. To conceptualize the concrete composite in terms of ontological *praxis* is to think one's way into the inherently ambiguous identity of the finite individual itself. In the end, however, Aristotle subverts the ambiguity of the finite individual and the instability and uncertainty it quite literally embodies by positing the ultimate authority of God as the principle of order. The individual is sacrificed in the name of stability, ambiguity traded for the sense, at least, of certainty and ultimate meaning. However, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle, having turned his attention away from the necessary and certain in order to think his way into the contingency of finite existence, develops a conception of knowledge capable of critically engaging the ambiguous finitude of the identity of the composite individual itself.⁷¹ Although he develops it in relation to human *praxis*, the structure of *phronēsis* lends insight into the nature and significance of ontological *praxis* and the unstable identity to which it points.

There are two dimensions of *phronēsis* that make it particularly effective in addressing the contingent individual whose identity is understood in terms of ontological *praxis*.⁷² First, Aristotle insists that *phronēsis* is directed toward the individual.⁷³ The individual, not the arbitrary freedom of the subject, is decisive for *phronēsis*. Phronetic judgment recognizes that whatever truth it contains ultimately depends upon its ability to do justice to the concrete presence of the individual with which it is concerned. From this perspective, the ontological significance of this ethical form of judgment can hardly be underestimated; for if the logic of ethical *phronēsis* is understood in relation to the notion of ontological *praxis* developed above, the concrete presence of the individual emerges as decisive for all ontological judgment. Thus, if ontological *praxis* grants a certain priority to the present over the past and the future, it is because what might now be called ontological *phronēsis* insists that the concrete encounter with the individual is the ultimate principle of all ontological judgment, that toward which *phronēsis* is directed and to which it must remain accountable. However, this encounter itself is never purely immediate; rather, it is always mediated by the burdens of the past and the hopes for the future, by the demands of the individual and the concepts of the judging subject.

This points already to the second dimension of *phronēsis* to be highlighted in this context. Although it remains always directed toward the individual, *phronēsis* nevertheless deploys universal concepts; for it is only through the deployment of concepts that an identifiable identity may be ascribed to the individual. However, because this identity is contingent, emerging only out of the concrete encounter with the individual, which is itself not, like the object of *epistēmē* or *sophia*, necessary, *phronēsis* cannot allow itself to be duped by the illusion that its concepts capture completely the very being of the individual with which it is concerned. The concrete presence of the individual resists the totalizing thrust of the concept. Thus, the universals deployed in ontological *phronēsis* cannot be rigid, for though their deployment is the condition for the possibility of meaningful relation, they must remain loyal to the contingency of the being with which they are concerned and cognizant of their own inherent finitude.

There are two aspects of *phronēsis* that allow it to resist the delusion of its own authority. First, Aristotle links *phronēsis* closely to *synesis*, or conscientious apprehension.⁷⁴ Because *phronēsis* is itself always embedded in a concrete context with others with whom it must be concerned, and further, because it must deploy concepts in determining these relations, its apprehension must always be conscientious – it must remain vigilantly aware of the violence endemic to each act of judgment and assiduously intent on doing justice to the individual with which it is concerned. By linking *phronēsis* to *synesis*, Aristotle fundamentally

undermines the idealistic model of free subjectivity, predicated as it is on the alleged authority of an isolated autonomous subject. Second, Aristotle claims that *phronēsis* must operate with *epieikeia*, or equity, which is the ability to correct universal laws when they fail to do justice to the individual because they are abstractly applied.⁷⁵ *Synesis* and *epieikeia* equip *phronēsis* with the capacity to be critically cognizant of the dangerous and totalizing dimensions of its own act of judgment. Ontological *phronēsis* recognizes that something like ontological identity only first becomes accessible as the finite concepts that determine the relation between the Same and the Other are deployed. Thus, if it remains possible to speak of identity at all, it must be the ambiguous, open, unstable identity that emerges out of this concrete, contingent relation. To speak of the identity of the Other as if it were immediately accessible and objectively present is to embrace a conceit that refuses to recognize the finite contingency of the concepts through which all ontological identity is determined.

Once ontological *praxis* is thematized in relation to *phronēsis*, a conception of ontological identity that undermines the totalizing tendencies both of Aristotle's conception of God and of Hegel's free subjectivity begins to emerge. Such a conception of identity would not be the totalizing identity of God because it would not reject potency, but rather recognize and affirm potency as the destabilizing force that enjoins openness and a vigilant willingness to critically evaluate the principles according to which identity is determined. And it would not quite be the self-positing identity of modern subjectivity, for it would not be so enthralled with its own liberty as to mistake its conceptual determinations as the objective identity of the being with which it is concerned. Rather, as always already embedded in and held accountable to its relation to the Other, every determination of the identity of *praxis* would be guided by the attempt to do justice to the concrete presence of the individual, rather than by an obsession for absolute truth, stability and security. Thus, it would not be determined by the free, arbitrary act of the subject, but by the inter-subjective ability to respond to the Other. Indeed, response-ability is the very meaning of ontological *praxis*; for it emerges out of the contingent relation of response between the Same and the Other.

Aristotle and Hegel after Auschwitz

Obviously, the conception of ontological *praxis* outlined above is only vaguely suggested by Aristotle. It is, indeed, a distorted picture of Aristotle from which emerges the possibility of thinking, quite literally, a different identity – or, perhaps better, an ontology of relation and

responsibility. The distortion, of course, arises not only from Hegel's appropriation of Aristotle and the limits and resources his (mis)interpretation offers, but also, and more fundamentally, from the shattered lens of Auschwitz through which not only Aristotle and Hegel, but the entire history of Western thinking must unavoidably be read. In the face of the horrors of the Holocaust, this sort of distortion of history is no mere regrettable loss – such a thought would be no more than naïve romanticism – but rather, distortion has become an ethical imperative of all thinking intent on engaging the history of Western philosophy. However, to argue that the hermeneutics of distortion is an ethical imperative for the historian of philosophy is not to suggest that any arbitrary view can be read into historical texts. Rather, it is to take seriously the place from which we read and the fact that, interposed between us and them, is an abyss that imposes itself upon us, enjoining us to read them through it. This need not be an injunction to give up on philosophy, on Hegel, Aristotle or any other thinker of the Western canon. Rather, it demands the much more difficult itinerary whereby we respond to these thinkers from the historical context in which we find ourselves. If the history of Western philosophy is to be a resource for thinking after Auschwitz, then it cannot be uncritically appropriated, for it has been inevitably distorted, rendered ambiguous. Yet it is precisely this distortion and ambiguity that, when read responsibly through the shattered lens of history, open up new hermeneutical horizons – horizons that suggest something other than a legacy of totalizing thinking.

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Notes

- 1 See, for example, Levinas, 1969: 42–8. There Levinas writes: 'Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being.' Adorno, for his part, writes of his own negative dialectics: 'Its movement does not tend to the identity in difference between each object and its concept. Rather, it is suspicious of identity. Its logic is one of disintegration, of the disintegration of the prepared and presented form of the concept which the cognizing subject has immediately over against it. Their identity with the subject is untruth. . . . The quintessence of identical definitions would correspond to the desired ideal of traditional philosophy, to the a priori structure and to its archaistic late form, ontology. This structure . . . is spiritualized coercion.' See Adorno, 1966: 148. For the English, see Adorno, 1994: 145. Future references will cite the German

edition followed by the English edition. Translations from German and Greek texts are my own throughout.

- 2 See, for example, Lacoue-Labarthe, 1990: 35: 'In the Auschwitz apocalypse, it was nothing less than the West, in its essence, that revealed itself.' In a similar vein, Zygmunt Bauman's article, 'Postmodernity, or Living with Ambivalence', suggests that the structural principle of modernity 'was bent on dominating the rest of the world by dissolving its alterity and assimilating the product of dissolution'. See Natoli and Hutcheon, 1993: 11. Jean-Luc Nancy has recognized, not that fascism is an inevitable result of Western thinking, but that it has always been 'a possibility of Western thought', and to ignore this fact is irresponsible. See Nancy, 1990: 107. For a good, detailed and subtle discussion of the relationship between recent 'post-modern' theory and the Holocaust, see Milchman and Rosenberg, 1998.
- 3 In his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Hegel writes: 'The Platonic philosophy is, in general, the objective, but the principle of life, of subjectivity is most proper to Aristotle, and it is not an accidental but rather a pure subjectivity.' See Hegel, 1996: 68.
- 4 This dialectic of determinate negation by which the subject wins its identity is powerfully expressed in the famous *Vorrede* to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* where Hegel thinks substance precisely as subject: 'Further, the living substance is being which is, in truth, *Subject*, or what is the same, that which in truth actually is only insofar as it is the movement of self-positing or the mediation of its becoming other with itself. It is, as subject, pure *simple negativity*, and for this reason the bifurcation of the simple, or the doubling that sets up opposition which is again the negation of this indifferent difference and its opposite. Only this self-restoring sameness or the reflection in otherness within itself – not an original or immediate unity as such – is the true.' See Hegel, 1986: III, 23; G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 10.
- 5 Adorno, for example, recognizes in Hegel a concern for order that is itself highly Aristotelian: 'For Hegel, order is good *a priori*, without its needing to answer to those living under it. Ironically, this conforms with his later reminiscence on Aristotle that "substantial unity is an absolute unmoved end in itself"' (Adorno, 1966: 331/337). In a similar vein, Levinas writes: 'Hegel returns to Descartes in maintaining the positivity of the infinite, but excluding all multiplicity from it; he posits the infinite as the exclusion of every "other" that might maintain a relation with the infinite and thereby limit it. The infinite can only encompass all relations. Like the god of Aristotle it refers only to itself, though now at the term of a history' (Levinas, 1969: 196). Nancy argues powerfully that 'the modern ideology of identity [*du propre*], of the intimate, of roots, has behind it, in whatever way, exactly the philosophy of the subject. Meaning, above all, of course, the Hegelian subject, that is, the Mind insofar as it is the ability to "contain within itself its own contradiction." Indeed, the "contradiction" opens onto it – but it is stitched into it, reabsorbed. And to that extent, the philosophy of the Subject signifies the infinite appropriation of exteriority' (Nancy, 1990: 110). Finally, David Patterson has leveled a strong critique of the

German philosophy of the subject from Kant through Hegel to Heidegger, suggesting that this sort of thinking ultimately culminates in Nazism. See Patterson, 1999: 163.

- 6 When we speak of objects with essential and non-essential properties, we are thinking with the Aristotle of the *Categories*. Michael Frede has recognized this in his essay 'Substance in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*'; see Frede, 1987: 72. When we calculate the amount and type of material needed to construct anything, or when we delineate the causes of things, we are thinking with the Aristotle of the *Physics*. Martin Heidegger has gone so far as to suggest that this sort of 'productive comportment' towards things is the decisive characteristic of Western metaphysics. For this reason, he has dubbed the *Physics* 'the hidden and therefore never fully thought through foundational book of Western philosophy'. See Heidegger, 1976: 242. Further, when we speak of practical reason, of the pursuit of happiness, of the organic unity of the community, we are thinking with Aristotle as well, the Aristotle of the *Ethics* and *Politics*, the Aristotle who placed biological paradigms at the center of his thinking. Thus, we might endorse Adorno's rather humorous, but nonetheless true, comment: 'We speak Aristotle all our lives "and don't even know it."' See Adorno, 2001: 78.
- 7 This interpretation of the *Metaphysics* is strong in Aquinas, and in modern times it has found expression not only in the work of Hegel, but also, more recently, in that of Joseph Owens. After the attacks leveled by Jaeger on the unity of the *Metaphysics* early in the 20th century, Owens again defends the position that the *Metaphysics* is a unified work culminating in the notion of Being as the pure activity of divine thinking. See Owens, 1978. Giovanni Reale, himself a defender of the unity of the *Metaphysics*, gives a very detailed summary of the scholarship on the status of book XII in Reale, 1980: 312–20.
- 8 For a discussion of the status of chapter 8 in the *Metaphysics*, see Jaeger, 1948: 342–67. He argues that XII.8 was written later and marks a clear revision of Aristotle's earlier, more 'Platonic' theory of the prime mover. For a different interpretation of the status of chapter 8, see Owens, 1978: 447–54. There Owens argues that chapter 8 is consistent with the rest of book XII insofar as it never questions the basic doctrine that there is only one ultimate prime mover of the universe, although it does suggest the existence of a plurality of unmoved movers (ibid.: 450). In the end, however, it is precisely the ultimate insistence on the supremacy of one authoritative hegemonic principle towards which everything is directed that justifies the talk of a 'totalizing' tendency in Aristotle's conception of God.
- 9 Bernstein, 1983: 18.
- 10 Or it could be called 'Parmenidean', or 'Plotinian', or 'Thomistic', or indeed 'Kantian'. In short, this anxiety seems to have haunted the entire history of Western philosophy, and the response to it has most often been within the tradition of Aristotle's thinking in *Metaphysics* XII.6–10, namely, to posit some absolute principle of order through which the totality of beings are determined. If we may fairly call this sort of thetic maneuver 'totalizing', then, indeed, there is a strong totalizing tradition at work here.
- 11 Aristotle, 1992: 1071b5. This is just the first example of where these two

- aspects of God's nature are intertwined in this text. Most often the principle is called eternal, with the implication that it is also immobile being simply assumed. References to the eternality of the principle occur throughout chapters 6–10; a non-exhaustive list of references includes: 1071b21, 1072a27, 1072b29–30, 1073a5, 1075a10.
- 12 For the necessity of God, see, for example, *Metaphysics* XII.7 1072b10–14, XII.10 1075a18–23. For separateness, see XII.7 1073a4. For unaffectability, see XII.7 1072a25–7, 1073a11.
 - 13 *Metaphysics* XII.7 1072a32–4. Ross writes of this: ‘“One” denotes that a thing is the measure of *something*, the unit used in counting an assemblage; “simple” denotes that a thing is itself in a certain condition, i.e. unmixed.’ See Ross, 1924: II, 376.
 - 14 *Metaphysics* XII.6 1071b2–11.
 - 15 Nietzsche's conception of the eternal recurrence is notoriously abstruse. I appeal to the term here not with the Nietzschean intention of pointing to a sort of anti-Kantian categorical imperative that teaches one to live each moment as if it would recur eternally; see Nietzsche, 1974: 273; see too Kaufmann's Introduction, pp. 15–21. Rather, it is meant to highlight the systematic function of the metaphor of the circle which is designed to secure the order of things by reducing them to a single hegemonic principle, the focal point around which everything is made to rotate.
 - 16 *Metaphysics* XII.7 1072a25–30.
 - 17 Ross, 1924: II, 374.
 - 18 *Metaphysics* XII.7 1073a3–5.
 - 19 Of course, the voice here is ambiguous, for morphologically the perfect middle and passive participles are the same. I suggest that the term be interpreted in the middle voice here due to Aristotle's own insistence that the first principle is not affected in any way by that which is other than itself.
 - 20 St Thomas Aquinas seems to proceed in a similar vein: faced with the destabilizing excess of the violence of God's omnipotent efficient causality, Aquinas posits an absolute final cause in order to secure the order of the cosmos, and the absolute authority of God. Richard Lee has outlined the moves Aquinas makes in this regard and the very Aristotelian conceptual apparatus he deploys. See Lee, 2001: 29–48.
 - 21 Arguably, this may mark an important difference between Aristotle's vision of the first principle and the expression of the Good beyond being in the sixth book of Plato's *Republic*. See, Plato, 1992: 509b5–10. If Plato's Good breaches the totality of being, it remains authoritarian insofar as it orders that which is. Levinas himself seems to affirm Plato's Good over Aristotle's pure activity because of the former's status beyond being. He does not seem to consider the authoritarian dimensions of the Good in Plato (Levinas, 1969: 103).
 - 22 *Metaphysics* XII.9 1074b27.
 - 23 *Metaphysics* XII.6 1071b21. As mentioned above, the simplicity of the first principle is established at *Metaphysics* XII.7 1072a33–5, while its pure actuality is mentioned in *Metaphysics* XII.6 1071b21 and XII.7 1072b27–30 to name just two instances.
 - 24 Hegel himself calls it the 'highest moment [*Hauptmoment*] of Aristotelian

philosophy' because it expresses the identity of the subjective and objective and thus it anticipates Hegel's own conception of the speculative idea. See Hegel, 1986: XIX, 162–3; for the English, see Hegel, 1995: 148.

- 25 The vocabulary Aristotle uses here in *Metaphysics* XII.7 to elucidate the manner of God's thinking, '*to dektikon*' (that which is receptive), '*thig-ganein*' (to touch), '*metalepsis*' (to take a share in), does seem to import a dimension of potency or receptivity into God's nature. These terms are all echoed in the discussion of *nous* in *De Anima* book III. There Aristotle makes an analogy between thinking and sensing, arguing that the thinking part of the soul 'must be unaffected [*apathes*], but capable of receiving [*dektikon*] the form and it must be able to be such as this form potentially but not this [form] itself; and the way in which thinking exists towards that which is thought is similar to the manner in which sense exists towards that which is sensed.' See Aristotle, 1988: 429a15–18. Earlier in the *De Anima*, Aristotle offers the proper metaphor according to which the notion of reception should be understood with respect to sensation. Using the same term, *to dektikon*, Aristotle suggests that sense is receptive of the forms without matter in the manner analogous to the way a piece of wax receives the impression of a signet-ring. It does not receive the gold or bronze of the ring, but its form (424a17–25). Without getting into the difficult hermeneutical issues this analogy raises (for a detailed discussion of it, see Slakey, 1961: 470–84), I mention it here only to suggest that the vocabulary Aristotle uses and the images he seems to have in mind do in fact suggest that there is even in God's thinking a receptivity of sorts. However, this is immediately undermined when Aristotle goes on to suggest that God's thinking is better than that of human beings; for according to Aristotle, it is better precisely because it is devoid of receptivity and thus is eternal.
- 26 *Metaphysics* XII.7 1072b24–6.
- 27 *ibid.*, 1072b28–30.
- 28 *ibid.*, 1072b8.
- 29 *ibid.*, 1072b27–8.
- 30 Aristotle is quite explicit about the fact that God must be without matter (1071b21, for example) or potency (1074b28–32). Within the context of Aristotle's metaphysics, matter and potency, often equated, stand for precisely the obstreperous principle of difference that threatens the secure order of the system. Nicolai Hartmann has recognized this, calling matter 'a moment of the metaphysical resistance against form, energy, purpose, spirit, etc.'. See Hartmann, 1957: 242. He goes on to suggest that this moment of resistance is a necessary part of any system of identity if it is to account for the individual. When considering God, however, Aristotle is concerned to establish secure order and not, as he perhaps is in the middle books of the *Metaphysics*, to account for the being of the individual. This is clearly indicated by Aristotle's strong expurgation of matter/potency from the nature of God's being.
- 31 *Metaphysics* XII.10 1074a13–15.
- 32 *ibid.*, 1074a18–19. The appeal to the '*pros hen*' relationship is particularly interesting in this context insofar as in *Metaphysics* IV.1 Aristotle famously organizes the many senses of being by making them all relate to one primary

- sense, namely 'ousia', 'substance'. Here already there is a tendency to reduce difference to the same, a tendency that will find a more robust and radical expression in the grand monistic pantheism of a Spinoza.
- 33 *Metaphysics* XII.10 1074a19–23. Aquinas too made much of these two metaphors. Richard Lee points out that a significant advantage the metaphor of the household has over that of the army general is that in a household there is a variety of different orders: the rules for the son are different from those for the wife, and still different are those for the slaves and livestock; see Lee, 2001: 42–3. Yet in this case too, the father is the ultimate principle of all orders.
- 34 *ibid.*, 1076a4–5. Ross suggests that the subjunctive 'estō', which is missing from most manuscripts of the *Metaphysics*, should be supplied for it is required by the rhythm of the sentence (Ross, 1924: II, 405). The hortatory subjunctive also fits well with the underlying motive of the citation for it expresses the command of the speaker. We may agree too with Ross's caveat that 'Aristotle is not a thoroughgoing monist'. He reminds us that God is not all-inclusive for the world retains matter that is not made by God. This reminder of a remainder is important, for it suggests that the totalizing tendency in Aristotle is itself not total, but remains only a tendency without rising to the level of absolute domination. Further, it reminds us of the important function of matter as the uncooptable Other of Aristotle's system. So long as this Other is affirmed, Aristotle's system will remain open and the totalizing tendency be held somewhat in check. A number of scholars, recognizing this dimension of openness, argue against a grand cosmological conception of teleology in Aristotle. This can be seen, for example, in Gill's treatment of sublunary, sensible *ousia* and her critique of the orthodox interpretation of Aristotle's cosmology; see Gill, 1989: 242. It can also be seen in the critique leveled by Nussbaum, Balme and Salkever of those who ascribe an over-arching cosmological conception of teleology to Aristotle; see Nussbaum, 1985, Balme, 1987, and Salkever, 1990, respectively.
- 35 In the scene from the *Iliad* to which Aristotle appeals at the end of XII.10, Odysseus has taken it upon himself to set the troops in order according to Agamemnon's command that the Greeks should not return home but rather must, despite their obvious desire to the contrary, remain to fight at Troy. Odysseus is so successful in this that, after Thersites – the single voice of the people to appear in the *Iliad* and one who is depicted by Homer in the most ignoble terms (although his insults against Agamemnon echo those of Achilles himself) – has been beaten into submission, the multitude praises the deed as the best of the things Odysseus has done for the Greeks. See, Murray, 1925: II, line 274. This shift in attitude illustrates the sort of transference that operates in totalitarian regimes – the ruled are not merely convinced, they are themselves transformed: the external rule is internalized. While in Odysseus' case, the rule is literally beaten into the governed, modern totalitarian regimes have developed sophisticated strategies of propaganda to instill their ideologies in the hearts of the people. The force of Odysseus' scepter has, in modern times, been transformed into the fearsome power of the mass media.

- 36 Arendt, 1973: 325. Herbert Marcuse further emphasizes this point when he recognizes that the Nazi aesthetic that glorifies classical conceptions and realistic renditions of beauty is designed to propagate features of submissiveness and domination. He writes of these landscapes and paintings: 'They transform stimuli for protest and rebellion into stimuli for coordination. They merge into an order which has succeeded in coordinating even the most hidden danger zones of individualist society, and they induce the individual to like and perpetuate a world which uses him only as a means for oppression.' See, Marcuse, 1998: 87–8.
- 37 Arendt writes: 'The ideology treats the course of events as though it followed the same "law" as the logical exposition of its "idea." Ideologies pretend to know the mysteries of the whole historical process – the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future – because of the logic inherent in their respective ideas' (Arendt, 1973: 469). I refer to Aristotle's conception of God as an 'ideology' in this sense; for Aristotle seems to determine the order of being by appealing to this idea.
- 38 The Michelet edition of the *Vorlesungen über der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Hegel, 1986: XIX, 156–68), will be, for the most part, employed in this discussion as the Jaeschke/Garniron edition (Hegel, 1996), does not clearly delineate the three stages of the development of *ousia*. The English translation by Haldane and Simon follows rather closely the Michelet edition and page references to this edition will be given after references to the German edition wherever possible. See Hegel, 1995. In general it may be said that the newest edition of the *Vorlesungen* by Jaeschke and Garniron, because it follows closely the course of the lectures as given in the 1825–6 academic year, gives a more coherent account of what Hegel actually taught that year. The problem with this is that 1825–6 is rather late in Hegel's career, when his ideas about Aristotle were already quite rigidly set. Thus, although there are significant problems with the Michelet edition, as suggested by Hoffmeister who criticized it harshly as being too haphazardly abridged and supplemented by Michelet himself, it still seems to me to provide the most coherent view of Hegel's grand interpretation of Aristotle. For a discussion of the problems with this text and the nature of Hoffmeister's critique, see Garniron and Hogemann, 1991: 110–19.
- 39 Here Hegel, at least according to the Michelet edition, appeals to *Metaphysics* XII.1–2, and VII.7. However, precisely *what* Hegel develops in speaking about this first stage seems to me more germane to the treatment of *ousia* found in the *Categories* and the first part of *Physics* A.7. For a brief discussion of Aristotle's treatment of *ousia* in these texts, see Long, 1999: 21–46.
- 40 Hegel, 1986: XIX, 156.
- 41 *ibid.*, 157/142. Cf. *Metaphysics*, VII.7 1032a12–14 where Aristotle writes: 'every thing generated is generated by something [*hypo tinos*, Hegel's "c"], and out of something [*ek tinos*, Hegel's "a"] and it becomes something [(*eis ti*, Hegel's "b").'
- 42 Hegel, 1986: XIX, 157.
- 43 *ibid.*
- 44 *ibid.*: 158. Hegel takes the notion that something is 'pre-supposed', in

German is '*vorausgesetzt*', very literally. What he means to say is that it is posited (*gesetzt*) from out of (*voraus*) itself. Thus, the word *Voraussetzung* already points to the centrality of mediation for Hegel. That matter is *vorausgesetzt* means that we are still at the stage of the first negation – where matter and (in this case) thought are not yet seen in their mutual dependence upon one another, but where thought posits matter as other than itself only *then*, in a second negation, to recognize this presupposition as determinative of its own being.

- 45 Michelet speaks of how excited Hegel's students were to hear this new interpretation of Aristotle, an interpretation that directly challenged 'the axiom defended by Locke to Kant up to Schleiermacher, that Aristotle was an unspeculative empiricist'. See Michelet, 1837: II, 686.
- 46 Hegel, 1986: XIX, 158.
- 47 *Metaphysics* XII.6 1071b21.
- 48 Hegel, 1986: XIX, 159–60.
- 49 Comparing Aristotle and Plato, Hegel writes: 'If, in Plato, the affirmative principle, the Idea only as abstractly self-identical is predominant, then in Aristotle the moment of negativity – not as change and also not as nothing, but rather as difference, determining is arrived at and emphasized' (Hegel, 1986: XIX, 155).
- 50 *ibid.*: 166/150–1. For the Aristotelian text, see *Metaphysics* XII.9 1074b27–35.
- 51 Hegel, 1986: XIX, 161/146.
- 52 See, for example, Hegel, 1986: III, 39/21 and Hegel, 1986: XIX, 165/150.
- 53 *ibid.*: 163–4/149.
- 54 Again, comparing Plato to Aristotle, Hegel writes: 'The Platonic position is the objective in the universal, but the principle of life is missing; the principle of subjectivity, not in the sense of an accidental, particular subjectivity, but rather of a pure subjectivity is peculiar to Aristotle' (*ibid.*: 153/139–40).
- 55 Hegel's technical use of the term '*Aufhebung*', which names the dialectical movement in which a lower stage is both negated and preserved in a higher stage, and his employment of the term '*Versöhnung*', or reconciliation, to name the sort of unity in which the two unified sides retain their distinction although their opposition is overcome, both go some distance in affirming difference, but they too are caught up in a logic of progression in which difference is tolerated only in order that it may find new and deeper expression in a higher form. For a brief discussion of these two terms, see Taylor, 1975: 119.
- 56 Hegel, 1986: 164/149.
- 57 For a very good and subtle discussion of these sorts of critique as well as the dangers and limitations of such views, see Stone, 2000. Stone is careful not to irresponsibly explain the Holocaust exclusively as the inevitable result of certain tendencies of modernity, nor does he discount the extent to which the structure of modern thinking helped determine an atmosphere in which the Holocaust was possible. Further, he recognizes the important dimension of irrationality that can be eclipsed by attempts to explain the Holocaust exclusively in terms of the modern totalizing forces of rationalization.

- 58 One such other mode of thinking has been traced from Aristotle through Ockham to Adorno and referred to as the 'para-metaphysical' tradition that runs throughout the history of Western metaphysics in Long and Lee, 2001: 92–112.
- 59 Hegel falls within a long tradition of Aristotle scholarship that can be loosely characterized as 'Thomistic', for Aquinas's interpretation of the *Metaphysics* clearly situates the discussion of God in book XII at the apex of the treatise, ending his discussion there and ignoring books XIII and XIV. A very sophisticated version of the Thomistic reading can be found in Owens's *The Doctrine of Being*. What Owens shares with Hegel is the desire to follow the trajectory of Aristotle's thinking, which seems to demand throughout a treatment of separate substance (1978: 91). To put this hermeneutical principle in Hegelian terms, although the order of the treatise is not always fluid and its parts seem to have been rather haphazardly placed side by side, they still form a systematic totality and this is recognizable if we follow the trajectory of the development of the speculative Idea (Hegel, 1986: XIX, 133/118 and 152/138). This Idea finds its highest expression in book XII (Hegel, 1995: 137).
- 60 *Metaphysics* VII.11 1036b22–3.
- 61 The middle books of the *Metaphysics* continue to be a widely discussed and variously interpreted text. This is clear from the plethora of new book-length interpretations of it that have appeared in the last few decades; see, for example, Gill, 1989; Loux, 1991; Halper, 1989; Witt, 1989; Frede and Patzig, 1988; and Scaltsas, 1994; to name a few. The following interpretation of the general trajectory of the middle books as well as the importance to the dynamic conception of identity Aristotle develops resonates with many aspects of L. A. Kosman's account; see Kosman, 1984 and Kosman, 1994.
- 62 *Metaphysics* VII.17 1041b5.
- 63 *ibid.*, VIII.6 1045b22–3.
- 64 Kosman has put this quite beautifully when he writes: 'In order fully to be itself, a motion must cease to be. Because of this auto-subversive character, a motion is, so to speak, on a suicide mission. A motion is fully realizable only posthumously; while alive, it has not yet fully achieved its being. For the achievement of that being lies in an entity other than itself, in the full realization that it is destined to bring about only at the expense of its being' (1994: 203).
- 65 *Metaphysics* IX.6 1048b18–35.
- 66 *ibid.* 1048b23–6.
- 67 This discussion can be traced back at least to Ackrill, 1965. The use of the perfect has often been seen as a test of sorts, one that is allegedly designed to determine whether an action is strictly speaking a *praxis* (or *energeia*) or if it is merely a *kinēsis*. On this view, the ability to use the perfect in conjunction with the present indicates that the activity is a genuine *praxis*. See, for example, Graham, 1980; and Penner, 1970. Kosman has taken issue with the emphasis on the temporal dimension of the use of the perfect, correctly suggesting that what is important about the perfect is *aspect*, not *tense*.

Graham too emphasizes the importance of aspect, but Charles Hagen, citing K. I. McKay, rightly suggests that the progressive aspect is normally given in Greek by the present and imperfect and that the completed aspect of the perfect seems to contradict this. Further, Hagen rightly insists that in order to determine what Aristotle intends with this rather odd formulation, we should rely on the overall textual context; for there is no real evidence in the context that Aristotle is concerned to develop a 'tense test' designed to determine whether a given action is a genuine *energeia* or a mere *kinēsis*. See Hagen, 1984: 268–9. On the whole, my sympathies lie with Kosman (1984: 124–5), and I tend to think that Aristotle deploys the perfect here, perhaps somewhat intuitively, to find an expression for an activity that is both complete and ongoing in itself. It seems to me that too much emphasis in the literature has been placed on *testing* whether an *energeia* is a state or an activity, and not enough has been placed on the notion that the formulation emerges out of an attempt to develop a dynamic conception of identity according to which potentiality and actuality can be thought together. Kosman clearly recognizes this, although he is perhaps too quick to expurgate the temporal features of the formulation, for it seems to me that precisely in this formulation Aristotle hits upon the peculiar and new temporality of *praxis* in which the past and future are brought together in the activity of the present.

- 68 See, for just a few examples, *Metaphysics* VII.7 1032a25, *Physics* II.1 193b12–3, *Generation of Animals* IV.3 767a36ff.
- 69 *Metaphysics* IX.6 1048b18–23.
- 70 As we have seen, Hegel's appropriation of the notion of *entelecheia* in Aristotle succumbs to precisely this delusion whereby substance is understood as subject. From the other side of the history of German idealism, Heidegger too seems to affirm something similar when he emphasizes the priority of the future as the 'primary phenomenon' of authentic temporality; see Heidegger, 1986: 329. Taminiaux has powerfully shown how this conception of temporality is related to Aristotle's conception of *praxis*. See Taminiaux, 1991: 122–37.
- 71 At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle signals this shift in the direction and focus of his inquiry when he suggests that it is inappropriate to demand absolute precision of the investigation into that which is contingent. Rather, we must seek only so much precision as the matter will allow (I.1 1094b12–28).
- 72 For a more detailed treatment of the meaning of *phronēsis* as discussed in this context, see Long, 2002.
- 73 *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.9 1142a24–31.
- 74 *ibid.*, VI.11 1143a1–18. Admittedly, this is a rather heavy-handed translation of *synesis*, which is often simply rendered as 'intelligence' or 'understanding'. Such translations miss the dialogical dimension of the term that suggests a sort of 'joining' or 'meeting together'. Further, they fail to recognize the etymological link between *synesis* and *suneidēsis*, or conscience. The bold translation I suggest is defended in more detail in Long, 2002: 45ff.

- 75 Aristotle develops the notion of *epieikeia* in the context of his discussion of justice in *Nicomachean Ethics* V.14 1137a32–1138a3. He discusses its importance for *phronēsis* in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.11–12 1143a1–1143b14.

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